

FEATURE – SMOKE JUMPERS HELP TRACK TREE KILLING BEETLE

INTRO: USDA Forest Service smoke jumpers help fight wild land fires in the western U-S. But in the offseason, some head east to track a tree killing bug. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more. (1:32)

THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT ACROBATS IN TRAINING. THEY ARE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOREST SERVICE SMOKE JUMPERS LOOKING FOR A TREE THREATENING INVASIVE SPECIES. THE SMOKE JUMPERS TURNED TREE-CLIMBERS ARE HELPING U-S-D-A'S ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE FIND EVIDENCE OF ASIAN LONGHORNED BEETLES.

Kevin Freeman, USDA APHIS: Our tree climbers will climb the tree and inspect limbs up to two inches in diameter to find damage produced by the Asian Longhorn Beetle. The damage could be egg sites where the female has laid eggs. Or it could be exit holes.

Kai Fredrichs, USDA Forest Service Smoke Jumper: There's not a whole lot of work available for us as fire fighters this time of year and so it gives a lot of us an opportunity to get additional work. This is also a good time of year to do surveys for the Asian Longhorn Beetle because the leaves are all off the trees. It makes the survey process quicker that way and we are less likely to miss things.

SMOKEJUMPERS SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN TREES AS PART OF THEIR FIRE-FIGHTING JOBS AND JUST NEED A LITTLE EXTRA TRAINING TO BECOME BUG HUNTERS.

Mark Hentze, USDA Forest Service Smoke Jumper: Sometimes we land up in the top of the tree and after we repel down we have to climb back up and get our parachute out and sometime our equipment or food. We just had to learn what to look for in the trees as far as egg sites and exit holes and what the beetle does.

THE BEETLES PROBABLY CAME TO THE U-S THROUGH IMPORTS FROM ASIA. THEIR LARVAE BORE INTO HARDWOOD TREES AND CAN KILL THE TREES OVERTIME. ACTIVE INFESTATIONS ARE CURRENTLY IN NEW YORK, NEW JERSEY, AND MASSACHUSETTS. FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.